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RUEHBN/AMCONSUL MELBOURNE 6752  
RUEHPT/AMCONSUL PERTH 5018  
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SUBJECT: PM RUDD REVAMPS DISASTER RESPONSE

REF: A. CANBERRA 906  
[1](#)B. CANBERRA 799

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: PM Rudd has ordered a comprehensive review of Australia's humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HA/DR) policies, procedures, and capabilities. The PM's announcement of the formation of a \$50 million civilian response corps at the East Asian Summit is one element intended to speed up Australia's disaster assistance. Changes will likely be made to leadership roles in disaster and management agreements with state governments. The National Security Advisor, Duncan Lewis, will serve as the HA/DR "Sherpa" and will seek to develop ties with similar officials in the region to provide an immediate senior approval for Australian assistance in a disaster. End Summary.

REVIEW UNDERWAY  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) Econoff met with Rob Floyd, Assistant Secretary for Infrastructure Security and Emergency Management at the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) on October

[1](#)30. Floyd heads a PM&C-led 30-day review of HA/DR capabilities and what changes are needed at the Federal and State levels to speed up delivery of assistance in the event of a regional disaster. Floyd said that Rudd was concerned that Australia's assistance to Indonesia following the recent Padang earthquake arrived more slowly than that of Switzerland, and is seized with making Australia a first responder in the region. Officials with disaster management experience, both in the field and in Canberra, are being seconded from Departments of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), AusAID, Health, Defense, and Emergency Management Australia to work on the review, which will report findings on November 23.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The report will lay out the structure and requirements for an Office of Deployable Civilian Capacity. The 500-person Australian civilian response corps (ACRC) that Rudd announced at the East Asian Summit is intended to provide a "ready reserve" capacity by 2011, which the Federal government will be able to call up and deploy rapidly in the event of a disaster. Currently, to dispatch disaster response personnel, like urban search-and-rescue experts, the government has to negotiate with the states and territories that maintain those assets full-time. Floyd said National Security Advisor Duncan Lewis will likely be the "command and control" element for the ACRC when called up, and will have the power to assemble teams of experts from different

jurisdictions quickly. Negotiations with state governments on setting up this capacity will be a central focus of the review process.

14. (SBU) According to Floyd, changes will likely be approved to the GOA's disaster management coordination systems. Currently, the GOA responds to a disaster by setting up an International Disaster/Emergency Task Force (IDETF), bringing together all the relevant agencies in a committee chaired by DFAT. Floyd said this model generally worked well, but that PM&C could take over chairing future IDETF's to spur quicker resolution of inter-agency gridlock. Another impact could be to put additional emphasis on the growing focus within the Australian Defense Forces on readiness, deployment, and response to disasters in the region. Floyd noted that Indonesia had almost immediately requested military medical assets after the earthquake, but had taken days to approve civilian and NGO presence. The GOA is exploring a closer integration of initial response capacity in a "hybrid NGO" form, rather than government-only, and thus help reassure skittish governments in the region and allow faster access.

15. (SBU) Comment: Any improvements to Australia's humanitarian assistance and disaster response policies, procedures, and capabilities, will not only improve responses to natural disasters, but will also translate into improved GOA contributions -- particularly from its civilian component -- to post-conflict and reconstruction missions in places such as Afghanistan. Floyd said PM&C, along with other agencies, were keen to coordinate with and take lessons from major players in the region, including USAID, PACOM, State,

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and other U.S. disaster response experts. The release of the review in late November will provide an opportunity to explore closer coordination with the GOA as it implements these changes.

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